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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION ON IRAQ, APRIL 21, 2004

**¶1.** Editorial in Tegucigalpa-based liberal daily "La Tribuna" on 4/21 entitled "Retreat" "The announced return of our troops has only confirmed a decision taken by President Maduro almost a month ago that he wouldn't request to Congress an extension to authorize the presence of additional Honduran troops in Iraq."

"Maduro's decision, which has been well received by the Honduran people, shouldn't upset any other member of the coalition. Neither should it change the good relationship between Honduras and the U.S., as it was confirmed by Ambassador Palmer."

"Anyway, there's not much to rebuild in Iraq now, since most of the troops can't leave their bases to avoid any clashes with Iraqi insurgents. The 'peace' mission we were told we would carry out has now become a very dangerous one."

"Considering such circumstances, there's still danger for our troops as long as they remain in Iraq. There's no doubt that our soldiers and their relatives will be very happy when they finally hear the trumpet for their final retreat."

**¶2.** Editorial in Tegucigalpa-based moderate daily "El Heraldo" on 4/21 entitled "Rectification" "Even though President Maduro said that the Honduran troops will return from Iraq 'as soon as possible' actually means about 'six to eight weeks' according to Minister of Defense Federico Breve, the decision to bring back our soldiers has fixed a mistake and brings tranquility to the troops, and to their relatives."

"Beyond the legal and moral objections to the war, invasion, and occupation in Iraq, the presence of Honduran troops has caused distress and uncertainty because the U.S. and its helpers haven't been able to earn the trust of the Iraqis, who see them as foreign enemies violating their sovereignty, not as their 'saviors'."

"We have enough social, economic and political problems to stick our nose in the business of others. We're glad President Maduro has finally understood this message."

**¶3.** Editorial in San Pedro Sula-based liberal daily "La Prensa" on 4/21 entitled "The return" "The announcement of President Maduro came as a result of the aggravation of the situation in Iraq, as well as the declaration of the new Spanish President of the immediate withdrawal of their troops."

"We hope the Honduran soldiers return in a short term, because even though President Maduro said they will return 'as soon as possible', he was also referring to his previous intention of not requesting an authorization from Congress to extend the presence of our troops. We expect that the coordination of the transportation from Iraq, which may be one of the main obstacles for their return, is done in relation to the safety and well-being of the troops."

Palmer